Joy

Picture this. For nearly thirty years, a massive concrete wall stood as a brutal dividing line right through the center of Berlin. It sliced families apart, separated lifelong friends, and locked an entire nation into two opposing worlds under rigid government control. In East Berlin especially, people lived through a long, grinding season of limitation and loss. They woke each day to restricted movement, censored news, and the constant ache of loved ones just out of reach on the other side. Many carried a quiet mourning for the freedoms they once knew, for the dreams that had been crushed, and for the simple human connections that the wall had stolen.

But on the evening of November 9, 1989, everything shifted in one astonishing moment. A government official stepped to a podium for a routine press conference and, because of a bureaucratic mix-up in new travel rules, announced that citizens could cross the border freely starting right away. The words hit like a thunderclap. Word raced through the streets and apartment blocks at lightning speed. Within hours, thousands upon thousands of ordinary men, women, and children poured toward the Wall from every direction. They arrived carrying whatever they could grab, hammers, chisels, crowbars, and even their bare hands. They climbed onto the concrete barrier and began hammering away with raw, unstoppable energy. Shock quickly melted into pure exhilaration as pieces of the wall started to fall.

Complete strangers threw their arms around one another and wept with relief. Families that had been torn apart for decades rushed into tight embraces at the checkpoints. Trabant cars, those small, iconic East German vehicles, honked their way through the newly opened gates in a chaotic, joyful parade. Bottles of champagne appeared from nowhere and popped open in celebration. Flowers passed hand to hand. People broke into spontaneous dancing in the streets while music blared from radios and portable speakers. What had been a symbol of oppression for twenty-eight years suddenly became the backdrop for one of the largest and most heartfelt street parties in modern history.

In the days that followed, the joy continued to unfold. Leonard Bernstein even conducted a special performance of Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” right at the Wall, swapping the word “joy” for “freedom” to capture the feeling of the moment. The old, unyielding structure simply could not contain the new reality that had arrived.

This historical event shows us how joy can arrive as the perfect, overflowing response when the long season of separation finally ends. It does not have to be forced onto every difficult day. Instead, it waits as the natural

enhancement that fits when the time is right and the new possibility breaks through.

Section I: Correcting Paul’s Teachings on Joy

Many of the sermons people have heard on the subject of joy over the years have drawn their main ideas and emphasis from the letters of Paul. This approach has shaped the common impression that joy must be a constant, nonstop reality in the Christian life, no matter what season or circumstances a person may face.

This way of teaching often feels like someone insisting on putting ice cream on your steak at every single meal. The sweetness is forced onto the main course whether the moment calls for it or not. It becomes an unnatural requirement instead of a beautiful, fitting enhancement.

The root of this issue is that the church has long treated Epistles, from the book of Romans through the book of Jude, as primary sources of doctrine. In truth, these letters are personal correspondence. Paul wrote them to encourage, correct, and instruct specific groups of Christians who were facing unique cultural and situational challenges in their time and place. He was not creating binding doctrinal texts on the same level as the Old Testament or the Gospels.

To understand why this correction is necessary, we must return to the clear rules for discovering truth that Jesus Himself lived by. Deuteronomy 8:3 states, “Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.” Jesus restricted His own beliefs and teachings strictly to what God says and what God does. He declares in John 5:19, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.” He also says in John 7:16-17, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.”

These verses establish the divine standard. Only what God directly says and what God demonstrates through His actions counts as doctrinal truth. Because Paul’s letters consist primarily of his own pastoral advice, reflections, and responses to specific church situations rather than direct quotations of God’s words or clear descriptions of God’s actions, they function as non-doctrinal texts for the purpose of establishing core Christian teaching.

The fault is not in Paul but in the Church. Think of it like making cologne.

When you make cologne you are taking many pure essential oils and mixing them together to make a fragrant scent. When Paul got converted, he spent two years studying God's Word. Paul, like all preachers and teachers today, was taking all the pure essential oils of the Word of God and preparing a fragrant cologne for the body of Christ. The mistake the church made was they mistook Paul's cologne for a pure essential oil. When you mix an already blended mixture with other pure essential oils the different scents come into conflict. Such as when you blend Deborah, Miriam, and Huldah being placed in positions of authority by God, with Paul's statement of 1 Timothy 2:12 NASBS But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet, Paul's blended cologne comes into direct conflict with the pure essential oils of God's Word.

When we treat Paul's statements such as "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4) and being "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10) as universal commands that must apply to every season of life, we create a heavy and unrealistic burden that God never placed on us. This produces constant pressure to perform joy even during genuine seasons of sorrow, loss, or difficulty. It leads to unnecessary guilt when joy is not felt and to a sense of spiritual failure when other emotions rightly take center stage for a time.

Today we are making an important correction. We set aside the forced approach that has required ice cream on every steak. Instead, we return directly to the words and framework of Jesus Himself. In doing so, we gain a proper, freeing, and accurate perspective on the true place that joy has in our lives.

Section II: Jesus' New Wine and Old Wineskins Framework: The Correct Model

Now that we have corrected the forced approach that has shaped so many teachings on joy, we turn directly to the clear model Jesus Himself gave us. This framework comes from a real moment in His ministry and offers the proper perspective on the true place joy holds in our lives.

Picture the scene in the first century. Jesus sits at a meal with tax collectors and sinners, people most religious leaders avoided because of their reputations. Some of those leaders and the disciples of John the Baptist approach Him with a pointed question. John the Baptist was a powerful prophet who called people to repentance and lived a strict life of fasting and prayer in the wilderness. His followers noticed that Jesus and His disciples were not fasting like they were, and like the Pharisees who fasted regularly to show their devotion to God. They asked Jesus why His followers were feasting instead of fasting.

Jesus answers them with a simple but powerful picture. He says the people with Him are like wedding guests celebrating with the bridegroom. You do not mourn or fast when the bridegroom is right there in the middle of the celebration. There will come a time when the bridegroom is taken away, and then the guests will fast in that season of absence. Jesus then gives two more illustrations to drive the point home. No one patches an old garment with a piece of new cloth, because the new cloth will shrink and tear the old one worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. New wine is still fermenting and expanding, so it needs flexible new wineskins that can stretch with it. Old wineskins have already hardened and will burst under the pressure.

This is the new wine and old wineskins framework. Jesus teaches there are appropriate seasons to every experience in life, and similar experiences such as joy is not a nonstop requirement pressed onto every part of life. We are to experience the natural, overflowing response that fits the season when the bridegroom is present or when the fresh reality of God's kingdom breaks through. In the same way the Berlin Wall stood for decades as a symbol of separation and loss, producing honest mourning, the moment it fell released a flood of celebration that no one had to force. Joy arrived as the perfect enhancement when the long season of rigidity ended.

This framework presents joy as being appropriate for certain seasons and experiences. Jesus states that there would be times when people would and would not experience joy.

John 16:20-22 NASBS
Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.

This is reminiscent of Ecclesiastes 3:1,4 NASBS
There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven- [4] A time to weep and a time to laugh; A time to mourn and a time to dance.

God created emotions to be experienced in their proper times and seasons, because through this process do we experience the fullness of life.

Let us explore this framework from three clear angles so we can see exactly how it gives us the proper perspective on joy.

Theologically, joy can flow from a direct revelation from God. In the upper room on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus says, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). Jesus is stating that the knowledge that He is bestowing on the disciples can give them a revelation of reality that will enable them to experience joy.

Pastorally, this framework brings real freedom and honesty. It removes the guilt that comes when other emotions take center stage for a time. Mourning, for example, is not a sign of weak faith. It is a genuine and valid response in the season when loss or absence is felt. The framework allows those seasons without shame. It invites us to feel the weight of loss fully, knowing that the new wine of God’s kingdom will produce joy again when the next season arrives. No one has to pretend everything is light when the moment calls for lament.

Experientially, the Berlin Wall story we opened with shows this truth in action. For nearly thirty years the wall created a long season of separation and mourning. Then, in one unexpected night, the new reality of freedom broke through. The celebration was not manufactured or forced onto every previous day of hardship. It erupted naturally because the time of joy had come. The old structure of division could not contain the fresh joy that arrived. In our own lives the same pattern appears. Hard seasons stretch us, and kingdom moments open the door for joy to enhance the experience without denying what came before. The framework lets joy serve as the fitting response that complements life beautifully when the heart is ready and the bridegroom’s presence is felt.

This is the correct model Jesus gives us. It replaces the pressure of constant sweetness with a living, seasonal rhythm. When we understand this, we move from performance to authentic relationship. The new wineskins are ready, and the joy that completes us waits for its perfect moment.

Section III: Jesus’ Own Statements on Joy Within the Seasonal Framework

Now that we have the correct model from the new wine and old wineskins, let us look at Jesus’ own statements about joy. Each one fits perfectly into the seasonal rhythm He described. Jesus never presents joy as a constant, forced requirement, that many interpret from Paul’s letters. Instead, He shows that when the bridegroom is present it is a time for joy and merry making, and

when the bridegroom is taken away that is the proper time for mourning and fasting. These statements run counter to Paul's statement of, "as sorrowful yet always rejoicing". Let's look at how Paul was always able to be rejoicing.

First, consider the setting of John 15. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus gathers with His followers in the upper room. He uses the picture of a vine and its branches to teach them how to remain connected to Him. In the whole verse He says, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). The phrase "These things I have spoken to you" points directly to the knowledge and revelation Jesus has just given. This knowledge equips the heart to see the good even in adverse circumstances. The word "may" makes the joy optional. It is not demanded in every moment. It becomes available as the fitting response when the heart, strengthened by that revelation, chooses to receive it. This is how a word from God or a fresh understanding can open the door to joy in adverse circumstances without requiring it constantly.

Paul experienced this very dynamic in his own life. Through the personal revelation of the gospel and the reality of union with Christ, Paul found the ability to experience joy even in the hardest seasons. His knowledge of what God had done in Christ acted like new wine in flexible wineskins. It did not erase the pain or trials, but it gave him the option to taste joy when the moment allowed.

In Philippians 4:11-13Paul says, "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Paul says "He learned the secret". Which means he has the personal revelation that allows him to experience joy in circumstances when one wouldn't normally experience joy.

I have walked a similar path, and can speak from my own revelation. My own understanding of simulation theory has shown me that the world around us is carefully crafted simulation that creates genuine meaning and value. This knowledge has made mourning a blessing rather than a spiritual failure. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted, because to be in a simulation that can cause you to care enough to create the very capacity to mourn confirms that something of true worth was created in the first place, and is in itself a miracle. My revelation did not remove sorrow. It gave me the ability to see that grief from loss is a celebration of God's creation.

Let's say you pour your heart and soul into making a fictional movie. When it

finally premieres and the audience's eyes fill with tears because the story you crafted touched them so deeply, would not that very sorrow be a powerful celebration of your work? Or if your story reached a triumphant ending and the whole crowd erupted in joyful jubilation, would that not also be a celebration of what you created? Yes, it would. On top of that, the audiences became emotionally invested into a story that wasn't real. In the same way, all the emotions we experience in life are a celebration of God's creation. The universe God made for us truly matters, and the fact that it moves us so deeply proves how successful that creation really is.

Jesus Himself confirms that there would be times when we would and would not experience joy and that these times are bound to come. In John 16:20-24 Jesus tells His followers that sorrow will come because He will be taken away, yet that sorrow will turn into joy. He promises that when they ask in His name, their joy will be made complete. This passage shows the full wineskins pattern in action. One season of absence and mourning gives way to unstoppable joy when the right moment arrives. The revelation God gives or the understanding we discover supplies the option to find joy even in those circumstances. This isn't the steak that is forced to be covered in ice cream, it's a steak in it's proper season that with knowledge and revelation can be optionally enjoyed with a sweet glaze sauce next to it on the plate.

Jesus, in prayer recorded in John 17, looks ahead to His departure and prays for His followers. In verse John 17:13 He says, "I speak these things in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves". Even after the bridegroom is taken away, His words remain as the new wine that keeps joy alive in their hearts. This statement shows joy as His lasting gift, carried forward into every future season through the flexible wineskins of obedience and relationship.

Jesus also models joy in the middle of everyday ministry. In Luke 10:21 the Bible records that Jesus "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" at a moment when hidden truths about the kingdom were revealed to ordinary people rather than to the wise and powerful. This spontaneous outburst happened during a kingdom breakthrough. It fits the bridegroom-present season perfectly, showing that joy can erupt naturally when God's reality breaks through in the right moment. Jesus did not force it onto every day. He celebrated when the season invited it.

Finally, Jesus paints a picture of heaven's own joy in the three parables of Luke 15. In the story of the lost sheep, a shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to search for the one that wandered away. When he finds it, he calls his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him. In the story of the lost coin, a woman searches her house until she finds the missing piece of silver, then invites

others to celebrate with her. In the story of the prodigal son, a father watches for his wayward child, runs to embrace him when he returns, and throws a feast of joy while the older brother stands outside in resentment. In each case heaven itself rejoices over what was lost being found. These parables call for earthly feasting rather than perpetual mourning. They show that joy is the fitting response in the season of restoration.

Every one of these statements from Jesus fits the new wine and old wineskins framework without contradiction. They replace the idea of joy as a forced, constant demand with a seasonal, relational gift. Joy belongs to the moments when the bridegroom is felt to be near, when the kingdom breaks through, or when restoration arrives. In the seasons of absence or loss, other honest responses have their place. This is the proper perspective Jesus gives us. It frees us to live in rhythm with the new wine rather than under the pressure of an unending requirement. The heart becomes a flexible wineskin, ready for whatever season God brings, and joy waits as the beautiful enhancement that completes us when the time is right.

Section IV: Practical Application – Living Joy in Its Rightful Place and Final Invitation

Now that we have we have a proper understanding of the place in our lives, the question becomes very practical. How do we actually live this out day by day? The good news is that Jesus' model is simple to apply and brings immediate freedom. Here are clear, actionable steps you can begin using right away.

First, understand the current season of your life. Every season of life that we are capable of experiencing has been created by God as God has given us the very capacity to experience them. All experiences, such as joy and grief, have been created by God to make our lives full and meaningful. Understand that grief and mourning is a celebration of God's created universe as God created such meaningful universe that when an aspect of it is gone you mourn it's loss.

Second, give every emotion its rightful place without guilt of having to perform as a Christian. If the season calls for mourning or reflection, allow it fully. You can freely grieve what needs grieving.

Third, share your seasonal stories with others. Talk openly with people you trust and witness to in your small groups, families, or conversations about the times when mourning has been a blessing and the times when joy has arrived as the perfect complement. These testimonies build community and encourage everyone to trust the wineskins rhythm Jesus described. As you do

this, you will discover how the same revelation that helped you can strengthen someone else.

This way of living has beautiful broader implications. Families feel less pressure to pretend everything is fine. Mental and emotional health improves because people are free to be honest instead of performing. And the church as a whole begins to model a more humane, Jesus-shaped way of life in a world obsessed with constant happiness. We become people who know how to mourn when mourning is called for and how to celebrate when celebration fits, all because we have flexible new wineskins ready for whatever season God brings.

Jesus invites every one of us into that same discerning rhythm today. The new wine is here. Your heart can become a flexible wineskin ready for whatever season arrives. You no longer have to live under the pressure of forced sweetness. You can live by Jesus' own words rather than later interpretations.

Let us close with a simple prayer together.
Lord Jesus, thank You for giving us Your own words about joy instead of a constant demand. Help us to abide in You daily so that Your joy may be in us when the moment is right. Teach us to discern each season with honesty, to mourn when mourning fits, and to receive the sweet glaze of joy when You bring it. Make our hearts flexible new wineskins that can hold whatever You pour into them. We commit ourselves to live by the rhythm You taught rather than by the pressure we once felt. In Your name we pray. Amen.
Now I invite you to take a quiet moment of response right where you are. Reflect silently on your current season. Ask the Lord whether this is a time for honest lament or a time when His joy is waiting as the perfect enhancement. Let the new wine do its gentle work in your heart. Take as long as you need. When you are ready, the Lord is ready to meet you in whatever season you find yourself today.